Met Office

NEWS

Are you facing a summer of sneezing?

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Up to 20 million Britons could be more sensitised this summer due to unusually high pollen count

- Grass pollen is the worst culprit when it comes to hay fever, with up to 20 million Brits are affected by it. Yet half of sufferers have no idea what type of pollen is causing their hay fever.
- The Met Office is engaged in joint research to help identify different grass pollen types cause most allergies, in order to help people manage their condition
- The NHS joins forces with the Met Office to provide tips on allergy relief, and advice on how to manage symptoms using the Met Office's pollen forecast and alerts.

Pollen levels were unusually high in recent weeks, with as many as 20 million hay fever and asthma sufferers impacted. But the worst may be yet to come, according to the Met Office, which alongside partner organizations, operates the only pollen-monitoring network in the UK and produces specialist forecasts that help support allergy and hay fever sufferers through the most difficult time of the year. And the reason for this summer of sneezing is grass pollen, which is just about to reach its peak.

Grass is the most common cause of hay fever in the UK, affecting 95% of sufferers and there are over 150 different species of grass in Great Britain and Northern Ireland. New research from the Met Office has revealed that two-fifths of hay fever sufferers (41%) suffer so badly that it ruins their whole summer. Surprisingly though, more than half (57%) of hay fever sufferers admit they don't know what type of pollen affects them, meaning they are not armed with the know-how to help combat their grass allergy.

Table 1: Awareness levels

	Most to least aware regions	
1	Wales	77%
2	Yorkshire	69%
3	Northern Irelan	68%
4	South West	67%
5	South East	66%
6	East Midlands	65%
7	Scotland	64%
8	East Anglia	62%
9	West Midlands	59%
10	North East	55%
11	North West	54%
12	London	41%

Worse still, according to the poll of 2,000 British hay fever sufferers, many are exacerbating their symptoms unnecessarily. Indeed, a third (35%) of respondents said they frequently hang washing out to dry in the summer, seemingly unaware that pollen sticks to their clothes. A further 40% said they leave their windows open to cool their home in the summer, an act that lets pollen inside. Amazingly, only 49% of sufferers said they take antihistamines to relieve their hay fever – battling through symptoms throughout their day.

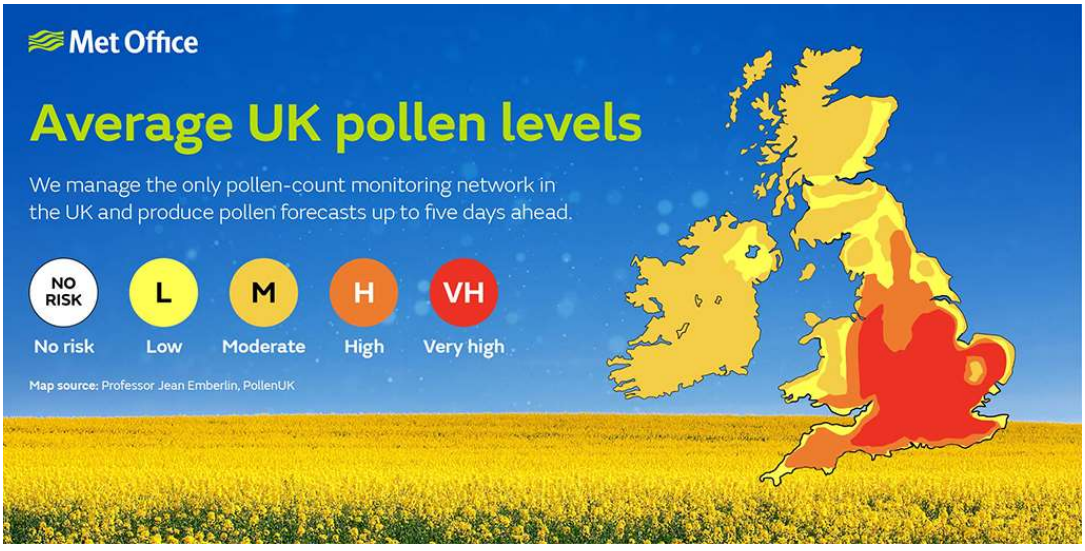
Although many non-sufferers question the seriousness of hay fever, the research also showed that it has a considerable impact on people's lives. A third (32%) said that whenever symptoms strike it puts them in a bad mood, whilst a fifth (23%) said it caused them physical and mental distress. A third (34%) said that despite their symptoms being bad enough to take a sick day, they feel too embarrassed to take time off, believing the ailment is not taken seriously.

The Met Office's Yolanda Clewlow, Manager of the UK pollen network, comments: "We know how seriously hay fever can impact people's lives in the UK, particularly as a result of grass pollen. This has led to our involvement in a dedicated research programme to identify the most significant of the 150 different species of grass pollen in the UK. We aim to help inform hay fever and asthma sufferers and empower them in managing their symptoms more effectively. We urge anyone that suffers from hay fever and asthma to check our pollen forecast or to download our simple to use mobile app to receive notifications when pollen levels are at their highest."

The NHS's South West Medical Director, adds "There's currently no cure for hay fever and you can't prevent it. But you can do things to help ease your symptoms when the pollen count is high. You can try putting Vaseline around your nostrils to trap pollen, wear wraparound sunglasses to stop pollen getting into your eyes and stay indoors whenever possible.

"For help in managing your symptoms, you should seek advice from your local pharmacist, who can suggest the best treatments, like antihistamine drops, tablets or nasal sprays".

Record numbers of people are now suffering from hay fever, with allergic rhinitis now the most common form of non-infectious rhinitis, affecting up to 30% of all adults and as many as 40% of children. With grass pollen season now in its peak, sufferers need to take appropriate precautions. That means checking the Met Office's pollen forecast before heading outside, taking necessary medication as allergies occur and trying to avoid activities that will exacerbate symptoms.



The Met Office's guide on how to lessen the impact of grass allergies this summer – in partnership with the NHS:

1. **Take antihistamines** from the start of the season to build up immunity and de-sensitise the effects of high pollen.
2. **Don't open the windows** when the pollen count is high – it's tempting to open your windows to let in cooling air =on a hot day, something that 4 in 10 hay fever sufferers admit to doing in the summer. You're better off keeping the windows shut and investing in a fan for days when the pollen count is high.

3. **Cut the grass** – Keeping grass short will help reduce symptoms and allow you to enjoy your garden as it only pollinates when it's long.
4. **Don't hang your washing outside** – leaving clothes to dry outside might be tempting in warmer weather but it will result in pollen getting stuck to them. You'll then be bringing pollen into your home also walking around in it too. If you have the space, it's best to dry your clothes inside.
5. **Limit your alcohol intake** – 1 in 5 hay fever sufferers admit they increase their intake of alcohol over the summer whilst enjoying the warm weather. Unfortunately, some studies have shown that many alcoholic drinks contain histamine, which is the same substance that's released into the body when you have an allergic reaction. Alcohol could therefore cause or worsen symptoms of asthma and hay fever, so try to limit the amount you're consuming over the summer.
6. **Shower in the evening** – Only 23% of hay fever sufferers said they shower in the evening, but this can prove an effective way to combat allergies. Washing away the pollen on your body is a great method to keep symptoms at bay.
7. **Change clothes when you come in from the outside** –Unsurprisingly, 8 in 10 hay fever sufferers said they don't do this, but a slight lifestyle change could prove a big help.
8. **Set up daily pollen alerts on the Met Office app**. They come straight to your phone at 7am so you can plan for your day and take your medication before you leave the house.

If you suffer from hay fever and want to manage your symptoms more effectively, why not check out the Met Office's dedicated pollen forecast? To receive pollen alerts, download the Met Office mobile app and request alerts for your area, when its moderate or higher.

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